# THE INVISIBLE PRISONER

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GUNSTON CLASSICS

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A Short Story of Arsene Lupin from the collection:
1912

**THE CONFESSIONS**
**OF ARSÈNE LUPIN**
**By**
# MAURICE LeBLANC

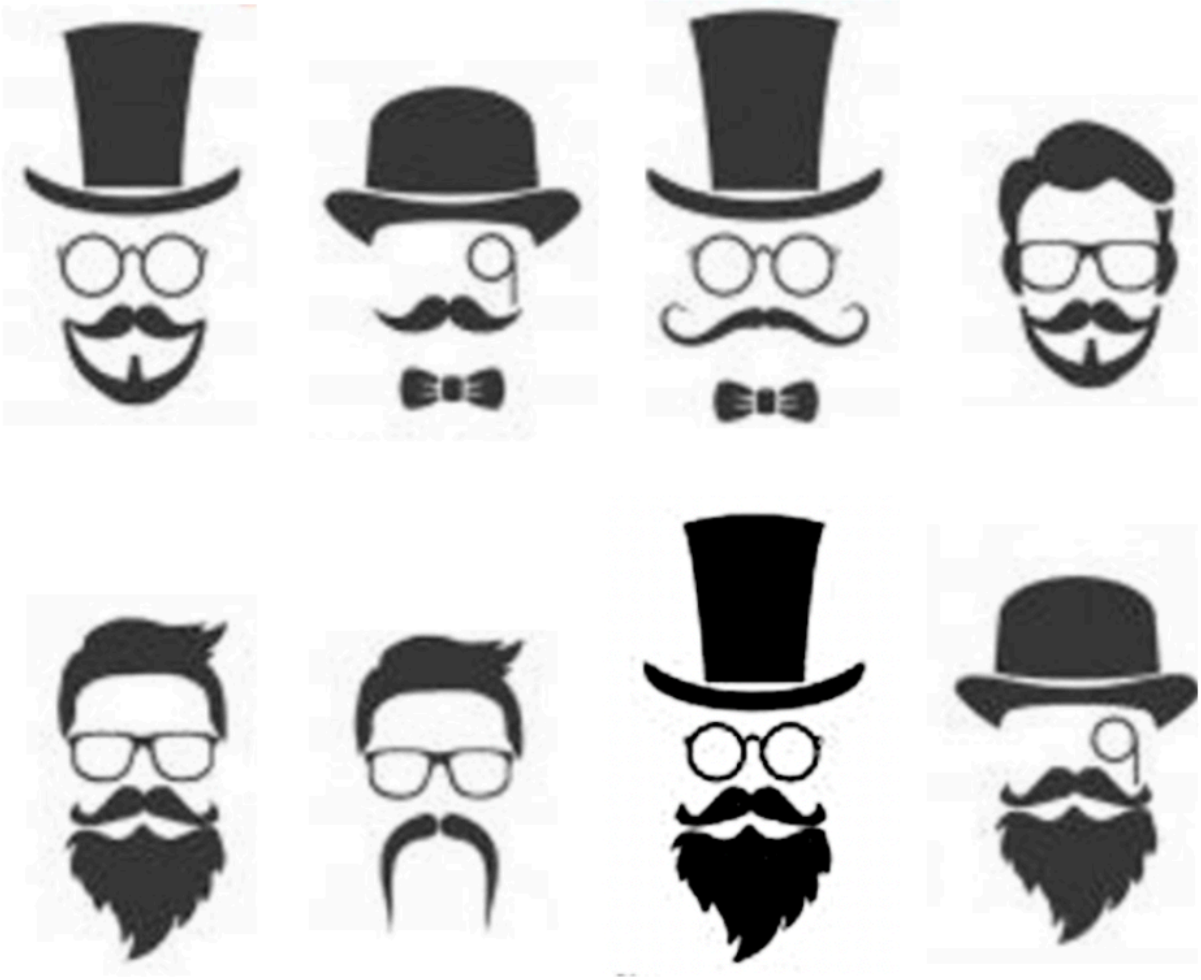
THE MANY DISGUISES
OF

# Arsène Lupin

# The Gentleman Burglar

# THE INVISIBLE PRISONER

## The Confessions of Arsène Lupin



# SERIES STORY No. IX

## THE INVISIBLE PRISONER

One day, at about four o'clock, as evening was drawing in, Farmer Goussot, with his four sons, returned from a day's shooting. They were stalwart men, all five of them, long of limb, broad-chested, with faces tanned by sun and wind. And all five displayed, planted on an enormous neck and shoulders, the same small head with the low forehead, thin lips, beaked nose and hard and repellent cast of countenance. They were feared and disliked by all around them. They were a money-grubbing, crafty family; and their word was not to be trusted.

On reaching the old barbican-wall that surrounds the Héberville property, the farmer opened a narrow, massive door, putting the big key back in his pocket after his sons had passed in. And he walked behind them, along the path that led through the orchards. Here and there stood great trees, stripped by the autumn winds, and clumps of pines, the last survivors of the ancient park now covered by old Goussot's farm.

One of the sons said:

"I hope mother has lit a log or two."

"There's smoke coming from the chimney," said the father.

The outhouses and the homestead showed at the end of a lawn; and, above them, the village church, whose steeple seemed to prick the clouds that trailed along the sky.

"All the guns unloaded?" asked old Goussot.

"Mine isn't," said the eldest. "I slipped in a bullet to blow a kestrel's head off...."

He was the one who was proudest of his skill. And he said to his brothers:

"Look at that bough, at the top of the cherry tree. See me snap it off."

On the bough sat a scarecrow, which had been there since spring and which protected the leafless branches with its idiot arms.

He raised his gun and fired.

The figure came tumbling down with large, comic gestures, and was caught on a big, lower branch, where it remained lying stiff on its stomach, with a great top hat on its head of rags and its hay-stuffed legs swaying from right to left above some water that flowed past the cherry tree through a wooden trough.

They all laughed. The father approved:

"A fine shot, my lad. Besides, the old boy was beginning to annoy me. I couldn't take my eyes from my plate at meals without catching sight of that oaf...."

They went a few steps farther. They were not more than thirty yards from the house, when the father stopped suddenly and said:

"Hullo! What's up?"

The sons also had stopped and stood listening. One of them said, under his breath:

"It comes from the house ... from the linen-room...."

And another spluttered:

"Sounds like moans.... And mother's alone!"

Suddenly, a frightful scream rang out. All five rushed forward. Another scream, followed by cries of despair.

"We're here! We're coming!" shouted the eldest, who was leading.

And, as it was a roundabout way to the door, he smashed in a window with his fist and sprang into the old people's bedroom. The room next to it was the linen-room, in which Mother Goussot spent most of her time.

"Damnation!" he said, seeing her lying on the floor, with blood all over her face. "Dad! Dad!"

"What? Where is she?" roared old Goussot, appearing on the scene. "Good lord, what's this?... What have they done to your mother?"

She pulled herself together and, with outstretched arm, stammered:

"Run after him!... This way!... This way!... I'm all right ... only a scratch or two.... But run, you! He's taken the money."

The father and sons gave a bound:

"He's taken the money!" bellowed old Goussot, rushing to the door to which his wife was pointing. "He's taken the money! Stop thief!"

But a sound of several voices rose at the end of the passage through which the other three sons were coming:

"I saw him! I saw him!"

"So did I! He ran up the stairs."

"No, there he is, he's coming down again!"

A mad steeplechase shook every floor in the house. Farmer Goussot, on reaching the end of the passage, caught sight of a man standing by the front door trying to open it. If he succeeded, it meant safety, escape through the market square and the back lanes of the village.

Interrupted as he was fumbling at the bolts, the man turning stupid, lost his head, charged at old Goussot and sent him spinning, dodged the eldest brother and, pursued by the four sons, doubled back down the long passage, ran into the old couple's bedroom, flung his legs through the broken window and disappeared.

The sons rushed after him across the lawns and orchards, now darkened by the falling night.

"The villain's done for," chuckled old Goussot. "There's no way out for him. The walls are too high. He's done for, the scoundrel!"

The two farm-hands returned, at that moment, from the village; and he told them what had happened and gave each of them a gun:

"If the swine shows his nose anywhere near the house," he said, "let fly at him. Give him no mercy!"

He told them where to stand, went to make sure that the farm-gates, which were only used for the carts, were locked, and, not till then, remembered that his wife might perhaps be in need of aid:

"Well, mother, how goes it?"

"Where is he? Have you got him?" she asked, in a breath.

"Yes, we're after him. The lads must have collared him by now."

The news quite restored her; and a nip of rum gave her the strength to drag herself to the bed, with old Goussot's assistance, and to tell her story. For that matter, there was not much to tell. She had just lit the fire in the living-hall; and she was knitting quietly at her bedroom window, waiting for the men to return, when she thought that she heard a slight grating sound in the linen-room next door:

"I must have left the cat in there," she thought to herself.

She went in, suspecting nothing, and was astonished to see the two doors of one of the linen-cupboards, the one in which they hid their money, wide open. She walked up to it, still without suspicion. There was a man there, hiding, with his back to the shelves.

"But how did he get in?" asked old Goussot.

"Through the passage, I suppose. We never keep the back door shut."

"And then did he go for you?"

"No, I went for him. He tried to get away."

"You should have let him."

"And what about the money?"

"Had he taken it by then?"

"Had he taken it! I saw the bundle of bank-notes in his hands, the sweep! I would have let him kill me sooner.... Oh, we had a sharp tussle, I give you my word!"

"Then he had no weapon?'

"No more than I did. We had our fingers, our nails and our teeth. Look here, where he bit me. And I yelled and screamed! Only, I'm an old woman you see.... I had to let go of him...."

"Do you know the man?"

"I'm pretty sure it was old Trainard."

"The tramp? Why, of course it's old Trainard!" cried the farmer. "I thought I knew him too.... Besides, he's been hanging round the house these last three days. The old vagabond must have smelt the money. Aha, Trainard, my man, we shall see some fun! A number-one hiding in the first place; and then the police.... I say, mother, you can get up now, can't you? Then go and fetch the neighbours.... Ask them to run for the gendarmes.... By the by, the attorney's youngster has a bicycle.... How that damned old Trainard scooted! He's got good legs for his age, he has. He can run like a hare!"

Goussot was holding his sides, revelling in the occurrence. He risked nothing by waiting. No power on earth could help the tramp escape or keep him from the sound thrashing which he had earned and from being conveyed, under safe escort, to the town gaol.

The farmer took a gun and went out to his two labourers:

"Anything fresh?"

"No, Farmer Goussot, not yet."

"We sha'n't have long to wait. Unless old Nick carries him over the walls...."

From time to time, they heard the four brothers hailing one another in the distance. The old bird was evidently making a fight for it, was more active than they would have thought. Still, with sturdy fellows like the Goussot brothers....

However, one of them returned, looking rather crestfallen, and made no secret of his opinion:

"It's no use keeping on at it for the present. It's pitch dark. The old chap must have crept into some hole. We'll hunt him out to-morrow."

"To-morrow! Why, lad, you're off your chump!" protested the farmer.

The eldest son now appeared, quite out of breath, and was of the same opinion as his brother. Why not wait till next day, seeing that the ruffian was as safe within the demesne as between the walls of a prison?

"Well, I'll go myself," cried old Goussot. "Light me a lantern, somebody!"

But, at that moment, three gendarmes arrived; and a number of village lads also came up to hear the latest.

The sergeant of gendarmes was a man of method. He first insisted on hearing the whole story, in full detail; then he stopped to think; then he questioned the four brothers, separately, and took his time for reflection after each deposition. When he had learnt from them that the tramp had fled toward the back of the estate, that he had been lost sight of repeatedly and that he had finally disappeared near a place known as the Crows' Knoll, he meditated once more and announced his conclusion:

"Better wait. Old Trainard might slip through our hands, amidst all the confusion of a pursuit in the dark, and then good-night, everybody!"

The farmer shrugged his shoulders and, cursing under his breath, yielded to the sergeant's arguments. That worthy organized a strict watch, distributed the brothers Goussot and the lads from the village under his men's eyes, made sure that the ladders were locked away and established his headquarters in the dining-room, where he and Farmer Goussot sat and nodded over a decanter of old brandy.

The night passed quietly. Every two hours, the sergeant went his rounds and inspected the posts. There were no alarms. Old Trainard did not budge from his hole.

The battle began at break of day.

It lasted four hours.

In those four hours, the thirteen acres of land within the walls were searched, explored, gone over in every direction by a score of men who beat the bushes with sticks, trampled over the tall grass, rummaged in the hollows of the trees and scattered the heaps of dry leaves. And old Trainard remained invisible.

"Well, this is a bit thick!" growled Goussot.

"Beats me altogether," retorted the sergeant.

And indeed there was no explaining the phenomenon. For, after all, apart from a few old clumps of laurels and spindle-trees, which were thoroughly beaten, all the trees were bare. There was no building, no shed, no stack, nothing, in short, that could serve as a hiding-place.

As for the wall, a careful inspection convinced even the sergeant that it was physically impossible to scale it.

In the afternoon, the investigations were begun all over again in the presence of the examining-magistrate and the public-prosecutor's deputy. The results were no more successful. Nay, worse, the officials looked upon the matter as so suspicious that they could not restrain their ill-humour and asked:

"Are you quite sure, Farmer Goussot, that you and your sons haven't been seeing double?"

"And what about my wife?" retorted the farmer, red with anger. "Did she see double when the scamp had her by the throat? Go and look at the marks, if you doubt me!"

"Very well. But then where is the scamp?"

"Here, between those four walls."

"Very well. Then ferret him out. We give it up. It's quite clear, that if a man were hidden within the precincts of this farm, we should have found him by now."

"I swear I'll lay hands on him, true as I stand here!" shouted Farmer Goussot. "It shall not be said that I've been robbed of six thousand francs. Yes, six thousand! There were three cows I sold; and then the wheat-crop; and then the apples. Six thousand-franc notes, which I was just going to take to the bank. Well, I swear to Heaven that the money's as good as in my pocket!"

"That's all right and I wish you luck," said the examining-magistrate, as he went away, followed by the deputy and the gendarmes.

The neighbours also walked off in a more or less facetious mood. And, by the end of the afternoon, none remained but the Goussots and the two farm-labourers.

Old Goussot at once explained his plan. By day, they were to search. At night, they were to keep an incessant watch. It would last as long as it had to. Hang it, old Trainard was a man like other men; and men have to eat and drink! Old Trainard must needs, therefore, come out of his earth to eat and drink.

"At most," said Goussot, "he can have a few crusts of bread in his pocket, or even pull up a root or two at night. But, as far as drink's concerned, no go. There's only the spring. And he'll be a clever dog if he gets near that."

He himself, that evening, took up his stand near the spring. Three hours later, his eldest son relieved him. The other brothers and the farm-hands slept in the house, each taking his turn of the watch and keeping all the lamps and candles lit, so that there might be no surprise.

So it went on for fourteen consecutive nights. And for fourteen days, while two of the men and Mother Goussot remained on guard, the five others explored the Héberville ground.

At the end of that fortnight, not a sign.

The farmer never ceased storming. He sent for a retired detective-inspector who lived in the neighbouring town. The inspector stayed with him for a whole week. He found neither old Trainard nor the least clue that could give them any hope of finding old Trainard.

"It's a bit thick!" repeated Farmer Goussot. "For he's there, the rascal! As far as being anywhere goes, he's there. So...."

Planting himself on the threshold, he railed at the enemy at the top of his voice:

"You blithering idiot, would you rather croak in your hole than fork out the money? Then croak, you pig!"

And Mother Goussot, in her turn, yelped, in her shrill voice:

"Is it prison you're afraid of? Hand over the notes and you can hook it!"

But old Trainard did not breathe a word; and the husband and wife tired their lungs in vain.

Shocking days passed. Farmer Goussot could no longer sleep, lay shivering with fever. The sons became morose and quarrelsome and never let their guns out of their hands, having no other idea but to shoot the tramp.

It was the one topic of conversation in the village; and the Goussot story, from being local at first, soon went the round of the press. Newspaper-reporters came from the assize-town, from Paris itself, and were rudely shown the door by Farmer Goussot.

"Each man his own house," he said. "You mind your business. I mind mine. It's nothing to do with any one."

"Still, Farmer Goussot...."

"Go to blazes!"

And he slammed the door in their face.

Old Trainard had now been hidden within the walls of Héberville for something like four weeks. The Goussots continued their search as doggedly and confidently as ever, but with daily decreasing hope, as though they were confronted with one of those mysterious obstacles which discourage human effort. And the idea that they would never see their money again began to take root in them.

One fine morning, at about ten o'clock, a motor-car, crossing the village square at full speed, broke down and came to a dead stop.

The driver, after a careful inspection, declared that the repairs would take some little time, whereupon the owner of the car resolved to wait at the inn and lunch. He was a gentleman on the right side of forty, with close-cropped side-whiskers and a pleasant expression of face; and he soon made himself at home with the people at the inn.

Of course, they told him the story of the Goussots. He had not heard it before, as he had been abroad; but it seemed to interest him greatly. He made them give him all the details, raised objections, discussed various theories with a number of people who were eating at the same table and ended by exclaiming:

"Nonsense! It can't be so intricate as all that. I have had some experience of this sort of thing. And, if I were on the premises...."

"That's easily arranged," said the inn-keeper. "I know Farmer Goussot.... He won't object...."

The request was soon made and granted. Old Goussot was in one of those frames of mind when we are less disposed to protest against outside interference. His wife, at any rate, was very firm:

"Let the gentleman come, if he wants to."

The gentleman paid his bill and instructed his driver to try the car on the high-road as soon as the repairs were finished:

"I shall want an hour," he said, "no more. Be ready in an hour's time."

Then he went to Farmer Goussot's.

He did not say much at the farm. Old Goussot, hoping against hope, was lavish with information, took his visitor along the walls down to the little door opening on the fields, produced the key and gave minute details of all the searches that had been made so far.

Oddly enough, the stranger, who hardly spoke, seemed not to listen either. He merely looked, with a rather vacant gaze. When they had been round the estate, old Goussot asked, anxiously:

"Well?"

"Well what?"

"Do you think you know?"

The visitor stood for a moment without answering. Then he said:

"No, nothing."

"Why, of course not!" cried the farmer, throwing up his arms. "How should you know! It's all hanky-panky. Shall I tell you what I think? Well, that old Trainard has been so jolly clever that he's lying dead in his hole ... and the bank-notes are rotting with him. Do you hear? You can take my word for it."

The gentleman said, very calmly:

"There's only one thing that interests me. The tramp, all said and done, was free at night and able to feed on what he could pick up. But how about drinking?"

"Out of the question!" shouted the farmer. "Quite out of the question! There's no water except this; and we have kept watch beside it every night."

"It's a spring. Where does it rise?"

"Here, where we stand."

"Is there enough pressure to bring it into the pool of itself?"

"Yes."

"And where does the water go when it runs out of the pool?"

"Into this pipe here, which goes under ground and carries it to the house, for use in the kitchen. So there's no way of drinking, seeing that we were there and that the spring is twenty yards from the house."

"Hasn't it rained during the last four weeks?"

"Not once: I've told you that already."

The stranger went to the spring and examined it. The trough was formed of a few boards of wood joined together just above the ground; and the water ran through it, slow and clear.

"The water's not more than a foot deep, is it?" he asked.

In order to measure it, he picked up from the grass a straw which he dipped into the pool. But, as he was stooping, he suddenly broke off and looked around him.

"Oh, how funny!" he said, bursting into a peal of laughter.

"Why, what's the matter?" spluttered old Goussot, rushing toward the pool, as though a man could have lain hidden between those narrow boards.

And Mother Goussot clasped her hands.

"What is it? Have you seen him? Where is he?"

"Neither in it nor under it," replied the stranger, who was still laughing.

He made for the house, eagerly followed by the farmer, the old woman and the four sons. The inn-keeper was there also, as were the people from the inn who had been watching the stranger's movements. And there was a dead silence, while they waited for the extraordinary disclosure.

"It's as I thought," he said, with an amused expression. "The old chap had to quench his thirst somewhere; and, as there was only the spring...."

"Oh, but look here," growled Farmer Goussot, "we should have seen him!"

"It was at night."

"We should have heard him ... and seen him too, as we were close by."

"So was he."

"And he drank the water from the pool?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"From a little way off."

"With what?"

"With this."

And the stranger showed the straw which he had picked up:

"There, here's the straw for the customer's long drink. You will see, there's more of it than usual: in fact, it is made of three straws stuck into one another. That was the first thing I noticed: those three straws fastened together. The proof is conclusive."

"But, hang it all, the proof of what?" cried Farmer Goussot, irritably.

The stranger took a shotgun from the rack.

"Is it loaded?" he asked.

"Yes," said the youngest of the brothers. "I use it to kill the sparrows with, for fun. It's small shot."

"Capital! A peppering where it won't hurt him will do the trick."

His face suddenly assumed a masterful look. He gripped the farmer by the arm and rapped out, in an imperious tone:

"Listen to me, Farmer Goussot. I'm not here to do policeman's work; and I won't have the poor beggar locked up at any price. Four weeks of starvation and fright is good enough for anybody. So you've got to swear to me, you and your sons, that you'll let him off without hurting him."

"He must hand over the money!"

"Well, of course. Do you swear?"

"I swear."

The gentleman walked back to the door-sill, at the entrance to the orchard. He took a quick aim, pointing his gun a little in the air, in the direction of the cherry tree which overhung the spring. He fired. A hoarse cry rang from the tree; and the scarecrow which had been straddling the main branch for a month past came tumbling to the ground, only to jump up at once and make off as fast as its legs could carry it.

There was a moment's amazement, followed by outcries. The sons darted in pursuit and were not long in coming up with the runaway, hampered as he was by his rags and weakened by privation. But the stranger was already protecting him against their wrath:

"Hands off there! This man belongs to me. I won't have him touched.... I hope I haven't stung you up too much, Trainard?"

Standing on his straw legs wrapped round with strips of tattered cloth, with his arms and his whole body clad in the same materials, his head swathed in linen, tightly packed like a sausage, the old chap still had the stiff appearance of a lay-figure. And the whole effect was so ludicrous and so unexpected that the onlookers screamed with laughter.

The stranger unbound his head; and they saw a veiled mask of tangled grey beard encroaching on every side upon a skeleton face lit up by two eyes burning with fever.

The laughter was louder than ever.

"The money! The six notes!" roared the farmer.

The stranger kept him at a distance:

"One moment ... we'll give you that back, sha'n't we, Trainard?"

And, taking his knife and cutting away the straw and cloth, he jested, cheerily:

"You poor old beggar, what a guy you look! But how on earth did you manage to pull off that trick? You must be confoundedly clever, or else you had the devil's own luck.... So, on the first night, you used the breathing-time they left you to rig yourself in these togs! Not a bad idea. Who could ever suspect a scarecrow?... They were so accustomed to seeing it stuck up in its tree! But, poor old daddy, how uncomfortable you must have felt, lying flat up there on your stomach, with your arms and legs dangling down! All day long, like that! The deuce of an attitude! And how you must have been put to it, when you ventured to move a limb, eh? And how you must have funked going to sleep!... And then you had to eat! And drink! And you heard the sentry and felt the barrel of his gun within a yard of your nose! Brrrr!... But the trickiest of all, you know, was your bit of straw!... Upon my word, when I think that, without a sound, without a movement so to speak, you had to fish out lengths of straw from your toggery, fix them end to end, let your apparatus down to the water and suck up the heavenly moisture drop by drop.... Upon my word, one could scream with admiration.... Well done, Trainard...." And he added, between his teeth, "Only you're in a very unappetizing state, my man. Haven't you washed yourself all this month, you old pig? After all, you had as much water as you wanted!... Here, you people, I hand him over to you. I'm going to wash my hands, that's what I'm going to do."

Farmer Goussot and his four sons grabbed at the prey which he was abandoning to them:

"Now then, come along, fork out the money."

Dazed as he was, the tramp still managed to simulate astonishment.

"Don't put on that idiot look," growled the farmer. "Come on. Out with the six notes...."

"What?... What do you want of me?" stammered old Trainard.

"The money ... on the nail...."

"What money?"

"The bank-notes."

"The bank-notes?"

"Oh, I'm getting sick of you! Here, lads...."

They laid the old fellow flat, tore off the rags that composed his clothes, felt and searched him all over.

There was nothing on him.

"You thief and you robber!" yelled old Goussot. "What have you done with it?"

The old beggar seemed more dazed than ever. Too cunning to confess, he kept on whining:

"What do you want of me?... Money? I haven't three sous to call my own...."

But his eyes, wide with wonder, remained fixed upon his clothes; and he himself seemed not to understand.

The Goussots' rage could no longer be restrained. They rained blows upon him, which did not improve matters. But the farmer was convinced

that Trainard had hidden the money before turning himself into the scarecrow:

"Where have you put it, you scum? Out with

it! In what part of the orchard have you hidden it?"

"The money?" repeated the tramp with a stupid look.

"Yes, the money! The money which you've buried somewhere.... Oh, if we don't find it, your goose is cooked!... We have witnesses, haven't we?... All of you, friends, eh? And then the gentleman...."

He turned, with the intention of addressing the stranger, in the direction of the spring, which was thirty or forty steps to the left. And he was quite surprised not to see him washing his hands there:

"Has he gone?" he asked.

Some one answered:

"No, he lit a cigarette and went for a stroll in the orchard."

"Oh, that's all right!" said the farmer. "He's the sort to find the notes for us, just as he found the man."

"Unless ..." said a voice.

"Unless what?" echoed the farmer. "What do you mean? Have you something in your head? Out with it, then! What is it?"

But he interrupted himself suddenly, seized with a doubt; and there was a moment's silence. The same idea dawned on all the country-folk. The stranger's arrival at Héberville, the breakdown of his motor, his manner of questioning the people at the inn and of gaining admission to the farm: were not all these part and parcel of a put-up job, the trick of a

cracksman who had learnt the story from the papers and who had come to try his luck on the spot?...

"Jolly smart of him!" said the inn-keeper. "He must have taken the money from old Trainard's pocket, before our eyes, while he was searching him."

"Impossible!" spluttered Farmer Goussot. "He would have been seen going out that way ... by the house ... whereas he's strolling in the orchard."

Mother Goussot, all of a heap, suggested:

"The little door at the end, down there?..."

"The key never leaves me."

"But you showed it to him."

"Yes; and I took it back again.... Look, here it is."

He clapped his hand to his pocket and uttered a cry:

"Oh, dash it all, it's gone!... He's sneaked it!..."

He at once rushed away, followed and escorted by his sons and a number of the villagers.

When they were halfway down the orchard, they heard the throb of a motor-car, obviously the one belonging to the stranger, who had given orders to his chauffeur to wait for him at that lower entrance.

When the Goussots reached the door, they saw scrawled with a brick, on the worm-eaten panel, the two words:

"ARSÈNE LUPIN."

Stick to it as the angry Goussots might, they found it impossible to prove that old Trainard had stolen any money. Twenty persons had to bear witness that, when all was said, nothing was discovered on his person. He escaped with a few months' imprisonment for the assault.

He did not regret them. As soon as he was released, he was secretly informed that, every quarter, on a given date, at a given hour, under a given milestone on a given road, he would find three gold louis.

To a man like old Trainard that means wealth.

***FIN***

Gunston Classics

**FRENCH MAGAZINE SERIAL STORIES**
**OF ASÈNE LUPIN**
**By**
**Maurice LeBlanc**

*Quick Reads*

**TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND FRANCS REWARDS!**

**THE WEDDING RING**

**THE SIGN OF THE SHADOW**

**THE INFERNAL TRAP**

**THE RED SILK SCARF**

**SHADOWED BY DEATH**

**A TRAGEDY OM THE FOREST OF MORGUES**

**LUPIN'S MARRIAGE**

**THE INVISIBLE PRISONER**

**EDITH SWAN-NECK**

## Arsène Lupin

Fictional gentleman thief and master of disguise created by French writer Maurice Leblanc

Arsène Lupin is a fictional gentleman thief and master of disguise created in 1905 by French writer Maurice Leblanc. The character was first introduced in a series of short stories serialized in the magazine Je sais tout. The first story, "The Arrest of Arsène Lupin", was published on 15 July 1905. Lupin is often described as the criminal counterpart to Sherlock Holmes, often encountering "Herlock Sholmès" in his own adventures. The character has also appeared in a number of books by other writers as well as numerous films, stage plays,

***K***